

A tribute to Richard S. Yeoman, the genius who changed coin collecting

By Roger Boye

Hobby pros are mourning the death earlier this month of Richard S. Yeoman, the author and creative genius who revolutionized coin collecting.

Yeoman, a long-time Racine, Wis., resident, died while driving a car near his retirement home in Tucson, Ariz. He was 84.

Yeoman wrote "A Guide Book of United States Coins," the so-called "Red Book" that has sold nearly 17 million copies since it was first published in 1946. He also was author of other coin references, and he designed the blue coin folders that have been used by legions of collectors.

During the Depression, Richard S. Yeo—who later used "Yeoman" as a professional and pen name—took a job in the marketing and advertising department of Whitman Publishing Co. in Racine. He soon was asked to promote a large coin board that Whitman had acquired.

At that time, the hobby attracted only a small number of professionals and academicians, who had no easy way to save their treasures. Coins often were laid flat in a drawer or dumped into an envelope.

The boards Whitman produced (and first sold in the Chicago area) were large enough for framing but difficult to store. That prompted Yeoman to de-

sign a 5¾-by-7½-inch blue folder, which was convenient to use and also protected the coins.

"Our product wasn't an instant success with everyone," Yeoman told me in 1978. "Some Chicago

dealers in the early '40s would snicker when I came in with the folder, saying people didn't learn anything by using it."

But those dealers soon realized that folder sales paid their rent.

Today, scholars acknowledge that the folder and "Red Book" have done more than anything else to make coin collecting one of the country's most popular hobbies.

Yeoman remained active until

the end, serving as a consultant to Whitman and visiting selected coin conventions. He won all of the hobby's highest awards, and was praised for his sincerity, generosity and organizational ability.